

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 0658

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: IS TRUDEAU CHANGING TACTICS IN HANDLING THE FRENCH
FACT?

1. DURING COURSE OF SEVERAL PUBLIC APPEARANCES IN
TORONTO ON FEB 17, PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU ADMITTED
THAT GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON BILINGUALISM HAD EITHER
BEEN WRONG OR IMPLEMENTED TOO QUICKLY. ARGUING THAT
HE WANTED ENGLISH-SPEAKING CANADIANS TO UNDERSTAND
"THE FRENCH FACT", TRUDEAU VARIOUSLY ASSERTED THAT:
(A) "WE HAVEN'T DONE ENOUGH TO CONVINCE QUEBECKERS
THAT WITHIN CANADA THEY ARE BETTER OFF"; (B) RISE OF
SEPARATIST MOVEMENT WAS REACTION BY QUEBEC TO THOSE
ENGLISH-SPEAKING CANADIANS WHO DO NOT ACCEPT RIGHT
OF THEIR FELLOW CITIZENS TO BE FRENCH-SPEAKING;
(C) MANY ANGLOPHONES WANT EVERYONE TO LEARN THEIR
LANGUAGE INSTEAD OF ACCEPTING THAT "20 PERCENT OF
OUR PEOPLE DO NOT SPEAK ANY OTHER LANGUAGE THAN FRENCH".

2. ON FEB 18 CBC RADIO NEWS CARRIED TAPE OF
TRUDEAU IN TORONTO STATING THAT FRANCOPHONES IN
QUEBEC WILL NOT LEARN ENGLISH AND THAT GOVERNMENT
HAS NO INTENTION OF FORCING THEM TO DO SO. HE
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ALSO SAW NO REASON WHY FRANCOPHONES SHOULD NOT
COMMUNICATE IN FRENCH FROM AIRCRAFT WHILE OVER-
FLYING THEIR OWN PROVINCE. BOTH STATEMENTS WERE
GREETED WITH APPLAUSE.

3. COMMENT: WHILE TRUDEAU'S REMARKS APPEAR TO HAVE
BEEN SOMEWHAT IMPROMPTU, THEY COULD MARK SIGNIFICANT

SHIFT IN GOVERNMENT TACTICS FOR HANDLING THE "FRENCH FACT". IN CONTRAST TO PREVIOUS EMPHASIS ON BILINGUALISM, TRUDEAU SEEMED TO ACCEPT IDEA THAT MANY QUEBECKERS PREFER TO REMAIN UNILINGUAL IN THEIR OWN PROVINCE - THE IMPLICATION BEING THAT ANGLOPHONES MIGHT DO THE SAME IN THEIRS. IF INTENDED, SUCH SHIFT WOULD TAKE STEAM OUT OF VIGOROUS ATTEMPTS TO FOSTER BILINGUALISM WHICH HAVE BEEN HALLMARK OF TRUDEAU'S POLICIES TO DATE FOR BRIDGING THE "TWO SOLITUDES". WHETHER POLICY SHIFT HAS IN FACT TAKEN PLACE WILL ONLY BECOME CLEAR FROM FUTURE GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS. WE NOTE, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT RECENTLY ANNOUNCED FEDERAL BUDGET MAINTAINS FUNDING LEVELS FOR GOC PROGRAMS TO FOSTER BILINGUALISM.

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